

American Post-Bag

Emma Goldman in Saint Louis (Missouri)

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December 1897

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Mon Vieux Peinard,

Anarchist ideas are making headway in the United States and if they have not spread more quickly it is because English-language propagandists have so far been too few and far between.

We would need lots of comrades of the calibre of Emma Goldmann who is presently making blessed propaganda wheresoever she goes.

This comrade does not know the meaning of tired! Scarcely has she been released from Blackwell Island prison in New York, after serving two years,¹ than she throws herself back into propaganda. She had been sentenced for letting her tongue run away with her unduly: at a workers' rally she had spoken too violently ... and just to prove that freedom of speech no more exists in "America the free" than in the slick monarchies and republics in Europe, she was scooped.

Emma Goldmann is of Russian extraction and Jewish parentage but she has long since renounced all religion and declared herself an atheist.

Tall, well-made, something like thirty five years old, she cuts a fine figure on the rostrum: she has a ringing voice, is given to gesticulation and speaks English and German alike with ease and eloquence. Also, she has enjoyed swelling success in the propaganda tour she has just made around the cities of the American continent.

Emma Goldmann's immediate objective is to whip up widespread agitation on behalf of comrade Bergmann [Alexander Berkman] who is serving 25 years' hard labour for having attempted in 1892 to blow the brains out of the martinet Frick, the manager of Carnegie's steelworks.

The exploiter Carnegie, the seventy-fold millionaire demon-crat who poses as a philanthropist was trying at the time to tighten the screws on the proles in his Homestead convict colonies, in Pennsylvania state. Since these good fellows would have none of it, this swine Carnegie mustered a gang of Pinkertons, volunteer police in the hire of their capitalist pay-master and unleashed them on Homestead. The moment they arrived, these Pinkertons worked wonders: they shot down the unarmed strikers and felled lots of them.

At which point, exasperated by the crimes of Carnegie and Frick, Bergmann tried to blow the brains out of one of the instigators of these craven actions.

¹ In fact, Goldman was arrested in 1893 at a demonstration of the unemployed for inciting to riot, found guilty, and sentenced to a year in prison, of which she served ten months.

Since when the poor fellow has been banged up!

And Emma Goldmann has rolled up her sleeves to secure his release.

Not that this means that in her talks Bergmann is all she has to talk about. In her most recent tour – which was also designed to revive memories of the execution of the Chicago anarchists – she spoke along general propaganda lines. Lucy Parsons, wife of Albert Parsons, one of the Chicago murder victims, accompanied her. She too is a belter of a propagandist! Since her husband's death she has not let up in her railing against the capitalist and government camp and reminding these nincompoops that they murdered an innocent man.

In addition to her clear and brilliant presentation of our ideas, Emma Goldmann never misses a chance to bait the police and there is not a meeting where she does not lay into the scum – which has the advantage of leaving the plain-clothed cops, plentiful at her meetings, to laugh on the other side of their faces.

Moreover, *mon vieux Peinard*, so that comrades may get some idea of the oratory of Emma Goldmann, let me offer you as best I can a summary of one of the talks² she gave in Saint-Louis to a packed hall and to frenzied applause from the public:

“In their utter ignorance, the masses have no knowledge of the reason for their existence.

“What is mankind's *raison d'être* if not to enjoy the beauties and splendours of nature?

“But do human beings know such enjoyment? If the answer is yes, they ought to be satisfied and happy – and if it is no, they have been robbed of their legitimate inheritance and are entitled to reclaim it.

“The latter is the true state of affairs: so, are men making their claim?

“Few of them dare! Only a few have that audacity – the anarchists! And these are despised, hounded, mown down, cast into prison or hanged ... All as punishment for their effrontery.

“As for the rest, the timorous slaves of the monopolies who bow and scrape, they do not possess the manly courage to make their minds known and demand that to which they are justly entitled.

“Religion, regardless of whatever it may go under, has always been the unfailing ally of the monopolists in oppressing the workers: it drums it into the poor ignorant slave that he should carry out the capitalist's instructions, obey the laws ... and go in terror of the flames of Hell.

“To the devil with Religion! If the howlers the priests tell were true, I should rather go to Hell with my anarchist comrades than to Heaven with the cowards.

“The law is not made against the rich man, only against the long-suffering pauper. The rich man makes the laws and, of necessity, he looks to his own interests by legislating against the people.

“If a mother steals bread to save her children who are perishing of hunger, she commits a crime, an outrage against Society, and Society must come down hard on that! If, on the other hand, a lady bedecked in diamonds and living in luxury steals from a shop, although she is not really in need, she is a kleptomaniac, her plight is to be pitied and she gets away with it.”

Then, looking at all of the mechanics of society, Emma Goldmann shows that the object of existing institutions is always to protect the rich and grind down the poor!

Then, turning to the Haymarket riots in Chicago in 1886 and to Homestead in 1892 and Hazleton³ just last month, she said:

² The *Le Père Peinard* correspondent reports on Goldman's talk in St. Louis on 16 October 1897 in Harugari Hall, on “Anarchy”.

³ On 10 September 1897, at least 19 men died and between 35 and 50 were injured, most of them shot in the back, when deputies opened fire on a peaceful march of striking miners at Lattimer, near Hazleton, in the anthracite region

“It is crimes like these that brought the people to a healthy appreciation of the task facing it. These capitalist massacres have had the result of stirring the dormant manly feelings in the hearts of men.

“The Hazleton sheriff, Martin, who gunned down the miners, does he think that he will only ever be confronted by bleating sheep?

“And those of his ilk, do they think that things will always be this way?

“Is it not, rather, evident that the massacres carried out by the capitalists and their henchmen will inspire the workers to arm themselves in order to resist by at least an equal, if not superior, force of arms?”

As for the likelihood of the Hazleton butcher, Sheriff Martin, being brought to trial, Emma Goldmann holds this as a mockery and she pokes fun at proles who imagine that the law, which he scrupulously observed, by ordering the massacre, will turn on him.

“Only a madman, she said, could believe that! And anyway, why should we look to the law? ... The law! We want no part of it! Each and every one of us is a living law and we claim for ourselves the right to right the wrongs and injustices foisted upon us...”

“Furthermore, she added, were X-rays able to delve into the recesses of the human mind, we should all be astonished at the numbers of anarchists in existing but unknown to one another, and who have simply not had a chance to break through the layer of prejudices by which they are cocooned. And the social system stifling us would not long survive!”

In conclusion, Emma Goldman points out that society will not be transformed through the ballot box but rather by force:

“And that may well come to pass before long, she cries, for the warning tremors have already rattled capitalist society!”

Ah, *mon vieux*, you should have heard the stamping feet and frenzied applause once this comrade had finished!

It warmed the cockles of my heart, b’God!

Ah, if only she were right; what a blessing if the squall were to come soon. I cannot wait! It cannot come soon enough ... for me!

Un vieux de la commode⁴

of north-eastern Pennsylvania. In March the following year, Sheriff James L. Martin and his deputies were acquitted of murder charges. Among anarchists and other on the left, “Hazleton” (historians now call it the Lattimer Massacre) became a symbol of the unpunished violence that could be meted out to organized labor. [p285]

⁴ translates as “an old hand from the furniture removal trade.”

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Originally published in *Le Père Peinard*, Paris, 19–26 December 1897, pp.4–5. Translated by Paul Sharkey. Notes by the Emma Goldman Papers.

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